

Educating for Character: Magical Books for Moral Growth in Lower

By Michael Cerkovnik

“The act of reading is a miracle.”—Maryanne Wolfe, author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*

“If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.”—Barry Lopez, author of *Arctic Dreams*

The following stories have found a special place in the lives of a number of teachers, parents, and students.

The Golden Rule, by Ilene Cooper (2007)

This is a must-have book to make the point that the most basic character education program is the Golden Rule. The captivating pictures draw the reader into six different cultural examples of the Golden Rule. Every classroom in our school has this book and I have given it to about 40 families. Several parents have commented that children read the book again and again. A great way to engage in parent partnership.

Chester Raccoon and the Big Bad Bully, by Audrey Penn (2008)

Even better than Penn’s earlier book, *The Kissing Hand*. You could hear a pin drop at readings of this book in both of our first-grade classrooms. The artwork is as superb as the story. The students insisted that I leave my copy in the classroom.

Simon’s Hook: A Story about Tease and Put-Downs, by Karen Gedig Burnett (2000)

This second-grade staple is a bit long for second graders, but it is worth the journey. *Simon’s Hook* should be read early in the year. It can be used in boundless ways to combat teasing.

The Don’t Pop Your Cork on Mondays! Series, by Adolph Moser and illustrated by David Pilkey (1988 on)

The series now covers all the days of the week. The children’s favorites are *Don’t Feed the Monster on Tuesdays!* and *Don’t Tell a Whopper on Fridays!* Some of the books of the series should only be used for specific purposes, such as *Don’t Fall Apart on Saturdays!* (divorce). I have had children come to my office and ask for one of the books years later.

Courage, by Bernard Waber (2002)

“There are many kinds of courage. Awesome kinds. And everyday kinds...including courage is two candy bars and saving one for tomorrow.” I love the simplicity of this book and its message. One fifth-grader told me she read the book 40 nights in a row when she was in the third grade.

My Friend is Sad, by Mo Willems (2007)

Again, buy multiple copies. *My Friend is Sad* helps boys (ages five-seven) express their feelings.

Inch and Miles: The Journey to Success, by Coach John Wooden (2005)

This book profiles in a child-friendly fashion John Wooden's pyramid of success. We have used this in the third grade, but it probably is better placed in the fourth grade. We have had students pick one of the attributes of the pyramid (e.g., determination), work on it for a month, and then reflect/write about their experience. This book could be used for an entire curriculum.

Just Kidding (2006), My Secret Bully (2004), and Sorry! (2006), by Trudy Ludwig, and Say Something, by Peggy Moss (2004)

We use this four-book combination in the fourth grade to dissipate relational aggression. Each book has teacher-friendly resources and guide questions. These books are imperative in setting the groundwork for the skills needed in the middle-school years. I highly recommend using all four titles in a planned fashion in the classroom. ■